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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000696

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV  
USPACOM FOR FPA  
USMISSION NEW YORK FOR AMBASSADOR TWINING

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM BM

SUBJECT: COM PRESSES HOME MINISTER TO RELEASE DETAINEES AND MOVE FORWARD ON RECONCILIATION

REF: RANGOON 665

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

¶11. (C) Summary: On June 11, COM had a frank meeting with Minister of Home Affairs Colonel Tin Hlaing to discuss the recent crackdown on the NLD and to deliver an advance copy of this year's Trafficking In Persons report. On recent NLD detentions, Tin Hlaing denied press reports that the government told Special Envoy Razali that Aung San Suu Kyi would be released immediately or in two weeks, saying there was no timetable for her release. He assured the COM, however, that the International Committee of the Red Cross would have access to recent detainees once a police investigation of the incident on May 30 is completed (although this contradicts what ICRC has been told, see septel). The Minister provided a detailed account of SPDC internal security concerns prior to May 30, and a description of what occurred the night of the clash. The COM said that allowing Embassy officers to visit the site of the clash was a positive approach. COM then described some of the information Emboffs collected which indicated a premeditated attack by trained individuals (some disguised as monks) and did not support the government's version of events. She stressed the extreme importance the USG placed on a credible investigation of the attack and full accounting for the people who have been missing or were detained since then. She reiterated that the U.S. saw no justification for the continued detention of ASSK and other NLD members and called for their immediate release. She urged the Minister to take actions to undo the harsh measures taken over the past 12 days and to use his influence to get the national reconciliation process back on track. She also provided the Minister a copy of the Trafficking in Persons report, noting that the government's failure to make progress on forced labor was the primary reason Burma was still on Tier 3. The Minister said his government "takes U.S. views very much to heart," and asked the COM to keep in close communication with him. End Summary.

NLD Crackdown

¶12. (C) In a June 11 meeting with Home Minister Tin Hlaing (accompanied by the Deputy Home Minister and an interpreter) the COM asked for clarification of news reports that Special Envoy Razali had said Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) might be released immediately or within two weeks. The Minister said there must have been some mistake because there was no timetable set for her release. He said that her protective custody is a temporary situation but there has been no decision when she might be released. The Minister said a formal police investigation of the incident that occurred on May 30 is underway, intimating that the results of the investigation will have a bearing on ASSK's release.

¶13. (C) The COM expressed the USG's concern regarding those missing after the May 30 clash and urged the Minister to provide an accurate account of what transpired that night and to account for those that are missing, injured, or dead. She asked if any charges had been fixed against those jailed after the attack and why 19 of the NLD leaders from the convoy were reportedly in protective custody and still incommunicado. The Minister said no charges had been made against anyone yet, that 25 of the people detained that night were released yesterday, and that others were being held as part of the investigation. He said the 19 NLD leaders were still in protective custody because, "The situation is confusing, not stable, and not to our liking. We want the dust to settle, then diplomats will be able to visit these individuals."

The SPDC's Version of Events

¶14. (C) He elaborated that the SPDC had evidence and intelligence that the incident was pre-planned (he did not elaborate by whom). He shared the following information, which he deemed "very confidential," regarding events leading up to the incident:

-- Earlier this year, ASSK and Senior General Than Shwe had dinner together and agreed on steps to national

reconciliation and democratic reform. Part of the agreement was that ASSK could rally her supporters in NLD offices but not elsewhere, and she could travel to any part of the country. (Note: This is the first official confirmation of this meeting. ASSK has always avoided any direct discussion or even acknowledgment of meetings with Than Shwe or Khin Nyunt when we have met with her. End Note.)

-- Up until January or February, everything went according to plan and there was no tension. Then, the SPDC received information that the NLD was planning a political change in June and ASSK started to break the rules established for her travels (see reftel, para. 3; this parallels what S-1 said to Razali.) She began to hold roadside meetings and speak to crowds gathered to see her at monasteries. She started traveling without keeping military intelligence advised of her plans, sometimes traveling through the night. This caused problems for them because they could not provide her adequate security. Military intelligence warned her repeatedly to keep them advised of her travel plans, but she did not.

-- In Kachin State, the SPDC found that a lot of people did not like ASSK and this became a big concern for the government. ASSK continued to cause problems which aggravated the people such as not paying tolls at bridge crossings, causing traffic jams with her motorcade, and using monks as a means of taking advantage of uneducated poor people.

-- At the same time, insurgent groups along the Thai border began rallying support for ASSK, producing pamphlets, and planting explosive devices. These activities seemed to be "in sync" with her activities.

-- Secretary One Khin Nyunt had planned to meet with ASSK in May but at the last minute she said she would be traveling, and she designated NLD Secretary U Lwin to meet with Secretary One.

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15. (C) Note: It is very unlikely that these "confidential" tidbits are original thoughts from the Minister; they are most likely the party line on why ASSK's activities could not be allowed to continue (the points about people not liking her because she did not pay bridge tolls, disrupted traffic, etc., have been leveled before and are becoming tiresome). The failure to coordinate her travel with authorities, fears of links to subversive groups, and the affront to Khin Nyunt for proposing a substitute to represent her at a requested meeting with him, combined with concerns about her growing popularity and independence, sound closer to the mark as to why the SPDC was unhappy. End Note.

16. (C) The Minister then segued into the events of May 30, saying that it was very confusing because it was dark that night but, so far, the following information was available. ASSK was supposed stay in Mon Ywa that night but instead chose to travel toward Depeyin. At a certain place in the road, there were 2,000 (down from the governments previous claim of 5,000) people "who were against her" who had blocked the road. Her motorcycle escort turned back when it saw these people but her car (with lights switched off) forced its way straight through the crowd, fortunately not injuring anyone. The second car, carrying NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo, also attempted to force its way through the crowd but it hit some people and came to an abrupt halt. A trailing motorcycle ran into it and crashed. The third car ran over the motorcyclist, killing him, and the whole convoy came to a halt. Violence then broke out until security police reached the scene, restored order, and took the injured to the hospital. U Tin Oo got out of his car and walked to Depeyin where he was put in protective custody; he was uninjured. After ASSK made it through the crowd, she also met the police and was taken into protective custody.

#### U.S. Concerns

17. (C) The COM said the information was appreciated and that the lack of interference with the Embassy officers who visited the site of the clash on June 4-5 was a positive step. She said that the information the Emboffs gathered from many people in the area, and the items they found at the scene, did not support the Minister's account of the incident. She provided a synopsis of the attack as related to Emboffs by many sources, which indicated that the convoy was blocked by trucks and attacked by an organized and trained group of armed individuals who wore white armbands to identify themselves. She said the idea that 2,000 local people would congregate in a field at night to attack ASSK was not a credible story and she hoped the government investigation would provide a more credible account. The COM also reiterated the USG's deep concern for the people missing and possibly injured or dead as a result of the attack. She urged the Minister to ensure a full accounting, including names of the dead, as soon as possible.

ICRC Access

18. (C) The COM noted that the ICRC has a standing agreement with the government to be notified of new political arrests and to have access to these detainees as quickly as possible, and asked if ICRC had been given access to those detained on May 30 or to other NLD members detained since that night. The Minister responded that the ICRC did not have access to these detainees yet but that it would be granted access as soon as possible. He said that normally ICRC is not granted access to detainees while an investigation is underway. The COM emphasized the importance of granting ICRC access to these detainees as quickly as possible. The Minister responded that he was the focal point for the ICRC, he knew the importance of their work, and he would make sure they got access. (Note: According to the head of ICRC in Rangoon, Secretary One Khin Nyunt told him on June 10 that ICRC would

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not get access to detainees taken in at the May 30 incident or since. The Home Minister was present at that meeting but perhaps he still hopes to gain access for ICRC. End Note.)

National Reconciliation Is Top Priority

19. (C) The COM said that the USG and the world is watching and the SPDC needs to not only restore the political climate that existed prior to the May 30 clash, but go beyond that in order to demonstrate that it is still committed to national reconciliation. She urged the Minister to do everything he could to quickly move the process forward and reminded him that he once told her "I do not like to keep Burmese people in jail". (Note: While we do not have any illusions that the Minister has the authority to act alone on this, he is one of the more approachable Ministers and he has good access to Secretary One. Certainly the COM's comments will be reported to at least that level, and hopefully higher. End Note.)

Trafficking in Persons

110. (C) The COM provided the Minister with a copy of this year's Trafficking In Persons report and Poloff provided an overview of the Burma section of the report. TIP falls under the Minister's purview and Poloff was able to report on several areas in which the Ministry and its partners had made progress on TIP during the year. Poloff noted, however, that Burma remained a Tier 3 country on the TIP ranking in large part due to its failure to make adequate progress on forced labor, which is included in the U.S. definition of TIP. The Minister appeared to appreciate receiving the report and feedback on his Ministry's actions (he does not have authority on forced issues).

111. (C) Comment: Despite the frank and candid nature of the COM's message in this one-hour meeting, the Minister was very cordial and stated in his closing remarks that he "takes U.S. views very much to heart," and asked that the Embassy continue to provide him with news releases and information on this matter and other issues as it becomes available. As with a handful of other Ministers, we have the impression that the Home Minister recognizes the serious problems in his government. End Comment.  
Martinez